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SONGS OF SEQUENCE OF THE NAVAJOS.

THE great majority of the multitudinous songs of the Navajo rites are divided into groups or sets. During the progress of the rites these groups follow one another in an established order, and in each group the separate songs must also follow one another in a certain order. For this reason I have, in previous essays, called songs of this character "songs of sequence."

In my paper on "The Mountain Chant," published in the Fifth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology, I have mentioned some of the more important rules concerning songs of sequence, and shall not now repeat them. My principal object at present is to show how the order of sequence is remembered.

The accomplished Navajo shaman must be a man of superior memory and of great intellectual industry. For one thing, he must commit to memory many hundreds of songs, and some of these songs are so sacred that not the slightest mistake can be made in repeating them without rendering void an elaborate and costly ceremonial.

One song I may mention in illustration of this statement is that of the *Atsa'leï*, or first dancers, which is sung at the beginning of the work on the last night of the great ceremony of the night-chant. The rite is one that may cost two or three hundred dollars to the patron. It has lasted eight days before the four singers, after long and tedious instruction by the shaman, come out to sing this song. Five hundred people are, perhaps, assembled to witness the public ceremonies of the night; some have come from the most distant parts of the wide Navajo territory; all are prepared to hold their vigil until dawn. A score or more of critics are in the audience who know the song by heart and are alert to discover errors. It is a long song, and consists almost exclusively of meaningless or archaic vocables which convey no idea to the mind of the singer. Yet not one syllable may be forgotten or misplaced. If the slight-

est error is made, it is at once proclaimed by the assembled critics, the fruitless ceremony comes to an end, and the five hundred disappointed spectators disperse. But fortunately they are not as particular with all their songs as they are with this.

To the careless listener these songs may seem to have little musical variety; but the more critical will discover that rarely are two repeated to the same tune. All these rude musical compositions, then, the shaman must also preserve in his memory.

As for the words, if the shaman had only significant ones to remember, his task might not be so hard; but the songs consist largely of vocables that are archaic or absolutely meaningless, like the fol-de-rol of the sailor's ditty. But the minstrel of the forecastle has an advantage over his compeer of the medicine lodge; the former may change his fol-de-rol to suit his fancy, the latter must not. Meaningless vocables may appear in any part of a Navajo song, but they are most common in the prelude which begins each stanza and the refrain which commonly follows each verse. The preludes and the refrains are the most characteristic parts of the songs. The former are, I believe, never quite alike in any two songs. I have observed that the shamans call to mind any particular song more by the meaningless syllables with which it begins than by any significant words it may contain, just as we often remember poems by means of first lines. Preludes and refrains are sometimes in part significant, but rarely or never significant *in toto*.

But how does the shaman remember the order of these songs of sequence? Does he possess any mnemonic key? He does. There is a myth for each set of songs, and this myth is the key. The song myths of the tribe are very numerous, and few songs, except extemporaneous compositions, exist independently of a myth. In some instances the myth is the more important part of the work, and we are impressed with the idea that the myth-maker composed his story first, and introduced his songs afterwards as embellishments; but in more cases the myth is a trifling element, and seems devised merely as an aid to memory, or as a means of explaining or giving interest to the songs.

When songs of sequence were being sung in the medicine lodge I have often heard a listener ask, "What happened now?" "What took place when this song was sung?" or some question of similar character, which showed that he wished to have myth and song associated together in the memory.

The songs I have especially selected on this occasion to illustrate my remarks are those known as Qastceqogan-çaike-gisin,¹ or songs

¹ In spelling the Indian words the alphabet of the Bureau of Ethnology is used.

in the farm or garden of the House God. They are part of a set called Qastceqogan-bigin, or songs of the House God, which number forty in all. The first ten are explained by one myth, the last thirty by another myth. These thirty, the farm songs, are the set to which I shall now particularly call attention. They are sung in different connections, but principally as a part of the regular ceremonial of the night-chant.

Qastceqogan signifies the god of the house or home. He seems to have special care of the cornfields. He is a home-god and farm-god, but he is not the only one of his kind in the Navajo Olympus. There are several groups of local divinities, each of which has its own qastceqogan.

The home-god of whom the accompanying myth is told dwelt at Tseıntyel, or Broad Rock, in the Cañon de Chelly, Arizona.

He went out one springtime as usual to prepare his farm, accompanied by several of his people, and proceeded towards a place where the sand washed out from a crevice in the cliffs and made a smooth slope favorable for planting. This place was called Agojoø. As he approached he sang his first song, the refrain of which is yooqania, which signifies "to approach."

When he reached the selected spot he cut a stick of a shrub called by the Navajos tsintlizi (*Fendleria rupicola*), and trimmed it to make a planting-stick. While engaged in this work, he sang the second song, or song of the planting-stick. The refrain of this is kisaá, a poetic modification of the Navajo name for the planting-stick, kic. The others who accompanied him performed similar labors.

Then they took their planting-sticks, or dibbles, broke ground, and planted corn, and as they did so the Home God sang the third song, or planting song. This is a very musical composition for an Indian song, and the refrain by which it is distinguished is kediclej, which signifies "I am planting." The miraculous corn planted by these gods was of such a nature that it grew to maturity in one night and ripened in one day, as the song tells us. The following is offered as a free translation of the song : —

The sacred blue corn-seed I am planting,
In one night it will grow and flourish,
In one night the corn increases,
In the garden of the Home God.

The sacred white corn-seed I am planting,
In one day it will grow and ripen,
In one day the corn increases,
In its beauty it increases.

The fourth song, which they sang when the planting was done, is much like the third.

Before they left the field the corn had already begun to grow, and they sang the growing song, which is much the same as the planting song, with added words which signify: "It grows with me in beauty; it matures with me in beauty; it ripens with me in beauty." When this was sung they returned to their homes.

Then Qastceqogan, the House God, sent Gaaskizi, the Harvest God, over to look at the crop, and while the Harvest God was in the field the Home God sang the sixth song, the refrain of which is *kaç xeya biçaca*, "now I come to the corn."

When the Harvest God returned he said, "The corn is already ripe," and the House God sang the seventh song. The significant words in this are for the most part like those of the third song, but the prelude and refrain are different. The latter, *qojo nesça aîe*, signifies "it is ripe in beauty."

Then the Home God, his father, his wife, his son, and his daughter, went into the field, and Qastceyalçi, the Talking God, followed them. There they found the corn ripe, the tassels in bloom, the blackbirds, the bluebirds, and all kinds of beautiful birds perched among the corn. Qastceqogan's son asked, "Why has the corn grown and matured so rapidly?" and the father replied, "It is the water of the dark cloud that makes it grow." The girl asked her mother, "Why has the corn grown and matured so rapidly?" and the mother answered, "It is the water of the dark mist that makes it grow." Then the father sang the eighth song, the refrain of which is *benaçakalà*, "with or by means of this it grows." A literal translation of the song runs thus:—

With this it grows, with this it grows,
The dark cloud, with this it grows.
The dew thereof, with this it grows,
The blue corn, with this it grows.

With this it grows, with this it grows,
The dark mist, with this it grows.
The dew thereof, with this it grows,
The white corn, with this it grows.

The boy then said: "Father the land looks beautiful with the corn, and why does it look so beautiful?" The god replied by singing the ninth song. This is the same as the eighth, except that the tune is different, and that the refrain, *beqojònigo*, "with this it is beautiful," is substituted for *benaçakalà*, "with this it grows."

The boy again spoke to his father, and said, "What does the corn eat that makes it grow?" and the god replied, "It eats the dew of the dark cloud, and the pollen of the tassel." The girl asked her mother, "What does the corn eat that makes it grow?" and the

goddess answered, "It eats the dew of the dark mist." Thus it is with children; they ask many questions, and when they have been answered they ask again.¹ Then the paternal god sang the tenth song, which may be thus rendered:—

This it eats, this it eats,
The dark cloud.
Its dew
The blue corn eats.
This it eats.

This it eats, this it eats,
The dark mist,
Its dew
The white corn eats,
This it eats.

"So this is what the corn eats," said the boy, "the water and the pollen?" The god then sang the eleventh song. This only differs from the tenth song in substituting the word *ç'o'yiani*, "it eats water," for *çi'yàni*, "it eats this."

As they wandered through the field, talking and singing, they came in time to where some beans were growing. These were already covered with beautiful blossoms, and some small pods had begun to form. The boy looked at them and said: "What is this, my father, that waves so beautifully in the breeze?" The paternal god replied: "This is what we call *naöle*" (the bean); and then he sang the twelfth song, the refrain of which is *benaöle*, "with the bean." The first verse may be rendered thus:—

The great corn-plant is with the bean,
Its rootlets now are with the bean,
Its leaf-tips now are with the bean,
Its dewdrops now are with the bean,
Its tassel now is with the bean,
Its pollen now is with the bean,
And now its silk is with the bean,
And now its grain is with the bean.

The second verse is like the first, except that the corn is called *tsiğa nanise*, "the true plant," and its various parts are referred to in an order the reverse of that which I have just given.

After this song they wandered farther in the field, and came to a place where squashes were in bloom. The children asked what these were, and the god replied, "They are *epeckani*" (squashes); and he sang the thirteenth song, the refrain of which is *benatsoi*, which means "with the horizontal yellow," and refers to the mass of yellow blossoms lying on a level with the ground. The thirteenth

¹ Such was the remark of the Indian who told me this story.

song is much like the twelfth, except in the refrain and in the tune. As in the twelfth, the second stanza repeats in an inverse order the expressions of the first stanza.

But even as they gazed the squash blossoms matured and changed from yellow to white and began to wither. The children asked, "Why do the blossoms change thus?" The god, in answer, sang the fourteenth song. This is the same in wording as the twelfth and thirteenth, except that the refrain is *benakai*, meaning "with the horizontal white."

Soon the children strayed away from their parents in the field, and they came to a place where they found some beans already matured. They picked each a double handful, and tied it with a string of white lightning. In the mean time the parents had pulled each a double handful of corn and tied it with a string of rainbow. Just then a shower was seen approaching, and the children ran back to their parents. Then the god sang the fifteenth song, which is nearly the same as the twelfth, but is accompanied by a different tune, and begins with the word *naöle*, "bean," instead of *benaöle*, "with the bean."

Then the god said, "The storm is near us. Let us start for home." The parents put their bundles on their backs; the children carried theirs in their hands. "Go ahead, children, and we will follow," said the god, and he sang the sixteenth song, the refrain of which is *naöle-lakai*, "the white bean." The song runs thus:—

Truly in the East
The white bean
And the great corn-plant
Are tied with the white lightning.
Listen! It approaches! (*i. e.* the rain approaches),
The voice of the bluebird is heard.

Truly in the East
The white bean
And the great squash
Are tied with the rainbow.
Listen! It approaches!
The voice of the bluebird is heard.

But the rain caught them before they left the field, and the water lay in pools under the corn, for it rained very heavily. The sight of this inspired *Qastceqogan* to sing the seventeenth song. This song begins with a number of meaningless or archaic syllables, and has for its refrain *yistsa*, "I hear it." The whole song may be rendered in these words:—

From the top of the great corn-plant the water gurgles, I hear it;
Around the roots the water foams, I hear it;
Around the roots of the plants it foams, I hear it;
From their tops the water foams, I hear it.

The woman, or goddess, said to the god : "You have a beautiful farm ; the dark cloud has descended to the ground ; the water is at the feet of your corn." Here he sang the eighteenth song. This begins with the meaningless expression, qoniaⁿ, oft repeated, and has for its refrain benasage, "on a level with ;" it may be thus translated : —

On your farm the cloud is level with the corn,
On your farm the water is level with the corn,
On your farm the mist is level with the plants,
On your farm the mist is level with the pollen.

Soon they reached home, and began to talk of their day's adventures. "Our father has a fine farm," said the children ; everything grows there." Whereat he sang the nineteenth song. This is much like the eighteenth, except that the tune and the meaningless syllables are different.

"Who makes the corn grow, and who attends to your corn for you?" the children now inquired. "It is the dark cloud and the dark fog that makes my corn grow," the god replied ; and he sang the twentieth song, which again is like the eighteenth in all but the tune and the meaningless syllables.

The children spoke again to their father (and my readers will recognize that a very patient and indulgent father is depicted in this myth), saying : "We would like to see the rain again, and we want to see where it comes from. It is pleasant to behold it falling." So the god led them out toward a point from which they could see the farm, and where, he told them, they could see the rain also. When he got to the place designated he began to sing again. The twenty-first song, which he sang on this occasion, contains two words which are the burden of hundreds of sacred songs among the Navajos. These are now archaic. They are not used in ordinary Navajo speech ; but the shamans give a traditionary meaning for them. *Qa'huijàni*, they say, means "the corn grows up," and *cihi-wàni*, "the rain pours down." Mr. A. M. Stephen, who has spent many years among the Moquis, and has studied their ceremonies as no other man has studied them, tells me that these archaic words occur in the ritual songs of the Moquis. The refrain of this song is *ol, ol*, an onomatopoe for "drop, drop." The song may be rendered thus into English : —

The corn grows up. The waters of the dark clouds drop, drop.
The rain descends. The waters from the corn leaves drop, drop.
The rain descends. The waters from the plants drop, drop.
The corn grows up. The waters of the dark mists drop, drop.

The children enjoyed looking at the rain. But soon the clouds began to break and the rain to subside, and thunder was heard.

"What makes that noise?" the boy asked; "is some one beating the sky?" In reply, his father sang the twenty-second song. This song again contains the words qa'huijàni and cihwàni, but in addition the words yailčo' naga, which means "he beats the sky traveling," *i. e.* some one moves around beating the sky.

When the shower was over the boy said: "Hui i'! [I rejoice, I am glad.] The sun shines on the farm; the bluebirds sing in the corn; all is beautiful to look at, and I rejoice." At this the parent sang the twenty-third song, which is much the same as the twenty-fourth song, following.

Then the boy remarked: "You must have laid down [*i. e.* planted] a long time." "Yes," said his father, "I have planted ever since the ancient days, — ever since we emerged from the lower world." And he sang the twenty-fourth song. This song is longer than those which have preceded it. Its refrain is niça silà, which means "I laid down side by side," or in a row, and is a figurative expression for "I have planted." I offer the following translation of the whole song: —

First Stanza.

Since the ancient days, I have planted,
 Since the time of emergence, I have planted,
 The great corn-plant I have planted,
 Its roots, I have planted,
 The tips of its leaves, I have planted,
 Its dew, I have planted,
 Its tassel, I have planted,
 Its pollen, I have planted,
 Its silk, I have planted,
 Its seed, I have planted.

Second Stanza.

Since the ancient days, I have planted,
 Since the time of emergence, I have planted,
 The great squash vine I have planted,
 Its seed, I have planted,
 Its silk, I have planted,
 Its pollen, I have planted,
 Its tassel, I have planted,
 Its dew, I have planted,
 The tips of its leaves, I have planted,
 Its roots, I have planted.

In the first stanza, corn is mentioned; in the second stanza, squash. The different parts of the plant are spoken of in the same terms in each, but in inverse order. While the squash has neither silk nor tassel, although it has analogous organs, the Navajo poet (according to a peculiar requirement of Navajo poetry) feels constrained to use the words for "silk" and "tassel" in his inverse list of the parts of the squash.

Qastceqogan then sent Gaaskiği, the Harvest God, and Çonenili, the Water God, over to the field to look at the crop, and he sang the twenty-fifth song. This is much the same as the twenty-fourth, having even the same refrain, *niça silà*, but it differs in its music and in the prelude.

The Water God, Çonenili, called aloud from the field, "All is ripe," on hearing which the Home God sang the twenty-sixth song. This is nearly the same as the twenty-fourth, but is sung to a different tune, and begins with different, meaningless sounds.

The animal sacred to Gaaskiği, the Harvest God, was the Rocky Mountain sheep (*Ovis montana*), and one or more of these animals always accompanied him. While he was in the field one of the sheep got into the corn. Gaaskiği tried to chase it out. It began to bleat; on hearing its cry, Qastceqogan sang the twenty-seventh song, a sheep song. This is again like the twenty-fourth, except that it has a different tune, and each stanza begins and ends with a musical jingle of *Meheyöö*, *Meheyöö*, *Mehe* being intended to imitate the voice of the mountain sheep.

It is a common thing, in these songs of sequence, to have several songs in succession repeat the same ideas, and differ from one another only in the music, or in the refrain or the prelude.

Then the gods of Tsentyel got together and they said: "Let us all help Qastceqogan to gather his harvest. The corn is ripe, and the ears are ready to drop out of the husks. The squashes are great, and are of all the colors that squashes ever wear. The boy and the girl first approached the field, and near its edge they saw a large ear of corn sticking out of the husk. "Which of us shall pull this ear?" said the boy; "shall I?" "No," said the girl, "I shall pull it." "No," said the boy, "I shall pull it." While they were arguing, their father approached and said, "Wait until I have sung a song and then you may pull it," and he sang the twenty-eighth song. It may be rendered in these words:—

Shall I cull this fruit
Of the great corn-plant?
Shall you break it? Shall I break it?
Shall I break it? Shall you break it?
Shall I? Shall you?

Shall I cull this fruit
Of the great squash vine?
Shall you pick it up? Shall I pick it up?
Shall I pick it up? Shall you pick it up?
Shall I? Shall you?

As soon as he sang this song they began to pull the ears from the corn and pile them up in a heap, and while they were so doing he sang

another song, the twenty-ninth. This has a prelude something like that of the twenty-eighth song, the words being *ciḡaiiêlào* and *woḡa woḡa ci*. It expresses much the same idea, too.

They put into the pile only the ripest and fullest ears. They allowed the immature to remain on the stalk. When all were ready to load the corn and take it home, the Home God sang the thirtieth and last song of the series. It has little significance, and seems to refer to the appearance of the stalks which have been robbed of their grain. It may be rendered in these words : —

I pulled it with my hand.
The great corn-plants are scattered around.
I pulled it with my hand.
The standing plants are scattered around.

The House God said : “ Load all this corn on your backs at once and start to my house, and as you go sing another song.” He bade his children begin the song, but they could not do it ; so his wife began, and the children and the others followed. The song means this : —

From the East,
Through the middle of your field,
Your corn moves. It walks.

From the West,
Through the middle of your field,
Your plants move. They walk.

This last song belongs to the myth, but does not belong to the series, and is not sung with it ; for it was not originally sung by the House God, but by his wife and people.

Such is a Navajo song myth. It reminds one of certain plays which have recently come into vogue, in which the plot, if plot can be found, serves no higher purpose than to hold together a few songs and dances.

Washington Matthews.